

Context

How are communities selected for participation in the Downtown Revitalization Initiative or NY Forward?

The ten Regional Economic Development Councils (REDCs) solicit interest in the program from communities in each of their regions. Interested communities submit applications using an application provided by the State. The REDCs review the applications against a list of desired attributes outlined in the Downtown Revitalization Initiative and NY Forward Guidebook and may also hear presentations from representatives of the most promising applications. The REDCs then nominate one downtown to receive \$10 million in DRI/NYF funding. For NY Forward, each REDC has the option of recommending two communities for \$4.5 million NY Forward awards or three communities, with one award of \$4.5 million and two awards of \$2.25 million.

What happens after the DRI/NYF award is announced?

A Local Planning Committee (LPC) made up of municipal representatives, community leaders, and other stakeholders is convened to work with the State and private sector experts to develop a downtown Strategic Investment Plan (SIP). The Strategic Investment Plan examines local assets and opportunities and recommend economic development, transportation, housing, and community projects that align with each community's vision for downtown revitalization and that are poised for implementation. The State awards DRI/NYF funds to select projects recommended in the Strategic Investment Plan that will advance the community's vision for its downtown and that can leverage and expand upon the State's investment.

May the DRI/NYF boundary proposed in the application be modified?

The DRI/NYF boundary proposed in the application is an initial determination of where a community wants to focus its revitalization efforts. As the selected DRI/NYF municipality goes through the planning process, it may determine that the initial boundary of the downtown area requires modification to address local issues or to capitalize on opportunities outside of the original boundary. Any boundary modifications are limited to earlier in the process, preferably no later than LPC Meeting #3. The resulting DRI/NYF area is generally consistent with the area proposed in the DRI/NYF application and follows the guidelines of a compact, walkable, and well-defined area. All projects recommended for DRI/NYF funding must be located within the boundaries contained in the final DRI/NYF Strategic Investment Plan.

Roles

Who prepares the DRI/NYF Strategic Investment Plan for each DRI/NYF community?

Development of a DRI/NYF Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) is a collaborative and open process that builds on the community's DRI/NYF application and other past planning efforts. The Local Planning Committee (LPC) leads the Downtown Revitalization Initiative or NY Forward planning process in each community, assisted by agency staff from the NYS Department of State (DOS), NYS Homes and Community Renewal (HCR), Empire State Development (ESD), New York State Energy Research & Development Authority (NYSERDA), and a consultant team hired by the State. Consultants work with the LPC and State agency staff to develop and execute a public outreach plan that informs, educates, and engages members of the local community in the process of developing the plan.

How are the Local Planning Committees formed?

After a community is selected to participate in DRI/NYF, a Local Planning Committee (LPC) made up of local and regional leaders, community representatives, and other stakeholders in the downtown is formed. Each LPC is led by two co-chairs consisting of the chief local elected official (or their designee) and a member of the Regional Economic Development Council (REDC). A DRI/NYF application may identify key individuals and/or organizations that should be considered for inclusion on the LPC, but final LPC membership will be determined by the State of New York in consultation with local leadership.

What is the role of the Local Planning Committee?

The Local Planning Committee (LPC) works with the consulting team, State planners, and key municipal representatives to develop a Downtown Strategic Investment Plan for the revitalization of its downtown. The LPC's role is to ensure that the Plan reflects the unique nature of the downtown and that it fully addresses current and potential residential, commercial, and institutional interests. The LPC meets at least monthly to brainstorm ideas, review products and proposals, and provide direction and feedback to consultants.

LPC members are required to sign a Code of Conduct as a reminder that they must always act in the public interest in their role as LPC members. Any member of the committee with a real or perceived conflict related to a specific project is given the opportunity to recuse from voting on or opining on the project that presents a conflict while still participating in decision-making for other projects.

What is the role of the State team?

Each DRI/NYF community is supported by a team of State agency staff from the Department of State (DOS), Homes and Community Renewal (HCR), Empire State Development (ESD), and New York State Energy Research & Development Authority (NYSERDA). The DOS project manager manages the consultant team, and assists the consultants and LPC in meeting preparation,

as well as preparation and review of DRI/NYF documents. The HCR representative brings to the planning process their knowledge of the community and expertise in housing development, Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), and HCR grants and programs. The ESD representative provides a wealth of knowledge of past, present, and proposed development in and around the downtown. The NYSERDA representative provides expertise in energy efficiency. When needed, State agency staff facilitates assistance from other State agencies, such as the Department of Transportation and NYS Council on the Arts.

The State team also works with the consultants to ensure project profiles include the appropriate level of information needed for State evaluation of projects, and that the final Strategic Investment Plans are fully compliant with all requirements set by the State.

What is the role of municipal staff from the DRI/NYF communities?

Professional and administrative municipal staff from the DRI/NYF community provide local assistance to the consultants and State team when local resources or expertise are needed. Municipal staff may assist with meeting logistics, provide necessary background data and information, help identify municipal programs and resources that can be leveraged to advance the DRI/NYF planning process, and act as a local point of contact for public engagement.

What is the role of the public?

Public engagement is a key component of the DRI/NYF planning process. A transparent and open planning process is fundamental to the success of the DRI/NYF effort, which will culminate in a DRI/NYF Strategic Investment Plan that reflects local needs and interests and can demonstrate broad public support. Throughout the planning process, stakeholders in the community, including municipal government, key employers and institutions, residents, business owners, stakeholder groups and organizations, and the general

public are invited to attend LPC meetings and public workshops to learn about the DRI/NYF process and its intended outcomes; to pose questions; to comment on the findings, goals, and recommendations; and to contribute project ideas.

Process

Who is the primary driver of the planning process?

The DRI/NYF is a collaborative program that includes key partners, including the Local Planning Committee (LPC), State agency staff, and a consultant team. The LPC is responsible for representing the interests and priorities of the community, while the State agency staff ensure that the process and deliverables are consistent with the goals, priorities, and requirements of the Initiative. In addition, the State team, together with the consultants, provide the necessary expertise, guidance, and technical assistance to develop a Strategic Investment Plan that achieves the vision and goals for revitalization of the downtown as approved by the LPC.

How will the LPC meetings be scheduled?

There is no prescribed meeting schedule for the LPC. The LPC members, working with the consultants and State planners, determine the most appropriate meeting schedule to deliver a final DRI/NYF Strategic Investment Plan by December 2023. However, it is anticipated that the LPC hold meetings at least monthly throughout the process. DRI communities will host at least six LPC meetings, while NYF communities will host at least five.

LPC meetings are held at the best time to accommodate LPC members – whether during the day or evening. These meetings are working meetings for LPC members. The public is welcome to attend all LPC meetings.

Must LPC meetings be open to the public, and if so, how will notice be provided?

LPC meetings are open to the public. Notice to the community should be provided through local media, municipal websites, and in any other manner deemed appropriate by the LPC to reach all members of the community.

Must LPC meetings be held in accessible locations?

Yes, LPC meetings are held in facilities that are accessible to individuals with disabilities.

Will the public be able to participate in LPC meetings?

All full LPC meetings are open to the public. The extent that the public are able to actively participate in a meeting will depend on the purpose and structure of the meeting. However, every full LPC meeting allows for public comment to be received.

Will there be other ways to participate if I can't attend the open houses, meetings, or events?

Program guidelines emphasize the importance of public engagement. In addition to in-person open houses, meetings, and workshops, outreach includes virtual opportunities to participate and an interactive web presence. Additional activities may include, but are not limited to, charrettes, surveys, information booths, and storefront information centers.

DRI/NYF communities think creatively and work with their consultant and state teams to develop strategies for public engagement with hard-to-reach populations.

How will LPCs make decisions?

The LPC decision-making process is left to the discretion of each individual committee. With public input, LPCs help determine the vision, goals, objectives, strategies, and projects for the DRI/NYF municipality. As a team,

the consultants and State agency staff work with their respective LPCs to establish a process for decision-making that is intended to seek consensus.

How many public engagement events will be required?

A minimum of three public workshops are required for DRI communities, while a minimum of two are required for NYF communities. In addition, two community outreach activities are required for DRI communities, while at least one is required for NYF communities. However, LPCs work with the consultant and State teams to creatively and consistently engage the public throughout the planning process beyond these minimum guidelines. In past rounds, DRI outreach has included activities such as focus groups, charrettes, surveys, information booths at local events, and even storefront information centers. Public engagement is conducted in different ways, both in-person and virtually, at the discretion of the LPC and in accordance with the needs of the individual community.

Will the planning effort revolve just around major projects and their impact?

The DRI/NYF planning effort includes a robust public planning process that confirms the community vision and develop goals, strategies, and projects to implement those strategies. Projects include both large- and smaller-scale projects for achieving identified strategies.

DRI/NYF Strategic Investment Plan

What is a DRI/NYF Strategic Investment Plan?

The first step in the DRI/NYF process is to create a unique Strategic Investment Plan for the downtown. Guided by the Local Planning Committees (LPCs), each Strategic Investment Plan builds on the application to present a

comprehensive approach to realizing the community's vision and goals for downtown revitalization.

Each LPC works with the consultant team and State planners to prepare a Strategic Investment Plan that includes:

- A description of the community's vision for the downtown
- An overview of the downtown including key characteristics, opportunities, and challenges
- Strategies and methods to achieve the downtown vision, including description of a management structure to oversee the implementation process
- Detailed profiles for a variety of projects that could utilize DRI/NYF funds to implement the community's vision for revitalization

Why is a Strategic Investment Plan required if the application identified projects?

Projects presented in the application along with the community's vision provide a strong foundation and direction for the DRI/NYF Strategic Investment Plan. The planning process builds on the application through extensive community engagement from which new projects or enhancements to already proposed projects may emerge. Additionally, the consultant team helps vet and further define projects including determining alignment with the vision and strategies for the downtown, readiness, financing, capacity of sponsor to undertake the project, and other attributes that allow all projects to be evaluated by the State for funding upon submission of the DRI/NYF Strategic Investment Plan.

What kind of projects may be recommended in the DRI/NYF Strategic Investment Plans?

DRI/NYF Strategic Investment Plans are expected to include an extensive list of economic development, transportation, housing, and community projects

that align with the community's vision for the downtown and State program goals and that may be implemented with a variety of public and private resources, including, but not limited to, the DRI/NYF allocation.

Recommended projects range in cost and scale from small improvements to large-scale construction projects, from public park improvements to complete streets redesign. The recommended projects clearly implement the vision, goals, and strategies for revitalization of the downtown, and taken together, represent a holistic approach to downtown revitalization.

Are there any specific project requirements?

- **Timing.** Projects must be able to break ground within two years or sooner of receiving DRI/NYF funding.
- **Project Size and Scale.** Projects must be large enough to be truly transformative for the downtown area.
- **Project Sponsors.** Every project must have an identified project sponsor. Sponsors may be public, not-for-profit, or private entities with the capacity and legal authority to undertake the proposed project.
- **Financing.** Projects should have financing commitments largely secured or be able to demonstrate a clear path to securing sufficient financing. This financing, combined with DRI/NYF funding, should enable the sponsor to undertake the project expeditiously.
- **Matching and Leverage.** New York communities are diverse. To meet the opportunities and challenges throughout the State, there are no programmatic minimum match requirements for the DRI or NYF with the exception of a small project fund. However, the LPC may impose match requirements as part of the planning process. For a small project fund, matching requirements must be no less than 25% of the total cost per project.
- **Site Control.** The project sponsor must have site control or be in the process of acquiring site control. If the project sponsor is leasing or renting the proposed project site, the property owner must agree to the proposed project in writing.

- **Building Decarbonization.** For DRI/NYF communities, all public, private, and not-for-profit projects that meet the criteria for new construction, substantial renovation, or a building addition shall include decarbonization techniques. Each of these projects will select a method demonstrating that the project satisfies the program decarbonization requirements, called the compliance path. Technical assistance regarding decarbonization strategies will be provided to project sponsors by NYSERDA and their consultants.

Are DRI/NYF funds limited to capital projects, such as a building, or sidewalk amenities, or can DRI/NYF funding be used for projects such as promotion or marketing of the downtown, rezoning, or establishment of local policies?

The vast majority of DRI/NYF funds are used for capital projects, though from time to time it may be appropriate to include a non-capital project. However, most projects transform the physical environment of the downtown in ways that benefit current residents and future generations. It is expected that a variety of economic development, transportation, housing, and community projects are identified for funding. Where necessary and under limited circumstances, certain non-capital projects such as downtown marketing, rezoning, and development of local policies that are necessary to catalyze development in the downtown may all be considered as potential projects for DRI/NYF funding in support of the goals and needs of the community.

Are there any types of projects that are ineligible for DRI/NYF funding?

DRI/NYF funds are intended to make a transformational impact on the downtown. Most, but not all, of those funds support improvements to the physical environment. However, there are some costs that are considered ineligible for DRI/NYF funding, including:

- **Planning activities.** Following the preparation of the DRI/NYF Strategic Investment Plan, all DRI/NYF funds must be used for projects that

directly implement the plan. Utilizing DRI/NYF funds for additional planning is not the goal of the program.

- Operation and maintenance. DRI/NYF funds cannot be used for on-going or routine expenses, such as staff salaries and wages, rent, utilities, and property upkeep.
- Pre-award costs. Reimbursement for costs incurred before the DRI/NYF Strategic Investment Plan is complete and before funding awards are announced is not permitted.
- Property acquisition. A DRI/NYF project profile may include the cost of acquisition in the budget of a larger redevelopment, but it must also show that the acquisition itself will be, or has already been, covered by another funding source.
- Training and other program expenses. DRI/NYF is a one-time infusion of funds, and cannot be used to cover continuous costs, such as training programs, that would cease to exist once the DRI/NYF funds have been expended.
- Expenses related to existing programs. DRI/NYF is not intended to supplement existing programs or replace existing resources.
- Parking garages. Construction or rehabilitation of stand-alone parking garages not connected with other uses will not be considered for DRI/NYF funding.

Are the projects that will be funded limited to the projects proposed in a community's DRI/NYF application?

No. During the application process, communities are asked to describe a range of transformative projects that could become part of the community's DRI/NYF Strategic Investment Plan to demonstrate that the community is ready to move forward with thoughtful and catalytic projects that benefit a growing downtown. However, the application form notes that all projects submitted in the DRI/NYF applications are further vetted by both the community and the State during the plan development process. The open, community-based planning process is designed to encourage creative and

innovative approaches to downtown revitalization, and results in a list of potential projects, including some that were contemplated in the initial application and others that arose during the process.

Are there any energy efficiency requirements for DRI/NYF-funded projects?

Yes. Any project proposed in a DRI or NYF Strategic Implementation Plan that meets the following minimum criteria is required to include decarbonization techniques:

- New construction projects > 5,000 SF
- Building addition projects > 5,000 SF
- Substantial renovation projects > 5,000 SF

Technical assistance regarding decarbonization strategies is provided to project sponsors by NYSERDA and their consultants.

Because decarbonization improves building performance and energy efficiency and reduces operating costs, all projects are encouraged to implement decarbonization techniques even if they do not meet the threshold criteria for new construction, substantial renovation, or building addition projects.

These projects are offered the same technical assistance for decarbonization as provided to those DRI/NYF projects that are required to comply.

Implementation

Who is eligible to receive funding for a project in a DRI/NYF?

Businesses, non-profit organizations, local development corporations, and municipalities are all eligible entities. State agency staff work with officials from the DRI/NYF community to identify the appropriate entity to hold the State contract.

Will the funds be provided on a reimbursement basis or upfront?

Funds are administered through the appropriate State agency. While there may be some variation between agency administration and the project type, awarded project funding is generally provided on a reimbursement basis.

May funds be used as match for NYS or federal grant funding?

The DRI/NYF funds may be used as match for other grant funding if permitted by the granting authority. However, the priority is to fund projects that are ready for implementation. Therefore, DRI/NYF funds are not held as matching funds for other grants whose award or implementation cycles are in the out-years.

How and when will funds be disbursed and by what agency/agencies?

Projects selected for DRI/NYF funding are assigned to the appropriate State agency or authority to manage implementation of the project. The managing State agency or authority and the method of funding disbursement are dependent on the specific project.

What happens to DRI/NYF funds if a project does not move forward?

As with most grant programs, there may be unspent funds that need to be reallocated if a grantee declines an award, is unable to undertake a project, or completes the project under budget. Funds that are unspent by a grantee may be repurposed by the State to other projects included in the DRI/NYF Strategic Investment Plan for the community for which the funds were intended consistent with program rules.

Are there signage requirements for DRI/NYF grantees?

Grantees responsible for improvements that are a direct result of the DRI/NYF process credit the use of State funds received through the Downtown Revitalization Initiative. Work plans for projects that improve the physical environment, such as new building, parks, marinas, and streetscape improvements, require the contractor or its construction subcontractor(s) to install a sign satisfactory to the agency managing the contract and identifying the State's funding of the project. While the approval process used by each agency may vary slightly, the agencies will share general requirements and a sign template.